Note to researchers:

In addition to this unclassified memcon for the meeting with the Bipartisan Congressional Leadership, Brent Scowcroft also created a classified Memorandum for the Record on this meeting. Although not yet declassified, the withdrawal sheet for the Memorandum for the Record can be found in the folder “Congressional (14)” in Box 3 of the collection National Security Adviser. Presidential Subject File.

WHM, 5/27/09
MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

UNCLASSIFIED

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: President Ford
Bipartisan Congressional Leadership
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State and
Assistant to the President for National
Security Affairs
Dr. James R. Schlesinger, Secretary of Defense
Lt. General Brent Scowcroft, Deputy Assistant
to the President for National Security Affairs

DATE AND TIME: Wednesday, May 14, 1975
6:30 p.m.

PLACE: Cabinet Room

President: Let me thank you for coming at such short notice. I thought
it important to fill you in on the chronology and tell you my decision. I
do this to comply with the War Powers Act and in order to keep you
abreast of developments.

[He went over the chronology of events:]

-- When we were notified
-- The NSC meetings
-- The message sent to the Cambodians, given to the Chinese,
  who didn't accept it. I instructed our Liaison Office to
deliver it to the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs.

On Tuesday morning [May 13] it appeared the crew was being moved
to the island. At 10:30 p.m., Tuesday, we had an NSC meeting. I ordered
interdiction. At 8:30 p.m., Tuesday, it looked like an attempt was being
made to move the crew to the mainland.

During the night we destroyed three boats, damaged four, and one
got to the mainland. Some of our craft received small-arms fire.
At 10:30 p.m., there was another NSC. I directed the Marines to prepare to seize the island. Our B-52's were alerted.

At noon on Wednesday, we sent a message to the UN that Cambodia was responsible if they didn't release the ship and crew.

At 3:00 p.m., we had another NSC. Here I directed the following. It is most important that you not reveal this.

1. Marines to land on the Holt and board the ship.
2. Marines to land on the island.
3. Aircraft from the Coral Sea to attack selected military targets at Kompong Som, where their Navy is, and at Ream, where there is an airfield.

These operations should begin everywhere simultaneously.

Kissinger: We published the note to the Secretary-General as the quickest way to get it delivered in Phnom Penh. We haven't heard anything from Cambodia since the beginning. We delivered it to the Chinese and the Cambodians, so we know it was received.

Schlesinger: On the boarding party is the crew, EOD, and interpreter. The island landing is simultaneous. It should be underway by 9:00.

Albert: Could Americans be on the boats that will be destroyed?

President: There is no way of knowing.

Byrd: Which way were they heading?

President: To the mainland. They ignored our warning.

Mansfield: Why are we going into the mainland of Asia again when we practically have the boat in our custody?

President: There are aircraft and boats in the area. The operation is designed to prevent these forces from interfering with our operations.

Mansfield: Is there any information that there are any Americans on the mainland?

President: Only that pilot report.

Mansfield: Where are the 39?
President: We are not sure where they are.

Byrd: Couldn't we have intercepted the boat some other way?

President: There were no surface ships there until today.

Byrd: Why did we move Marines to Thailand? Have the Thais protested?

President: It was the only way we could get the Marines in position. We don't plan to return them to Thailand.

O'Neill: Was it in international waters when it was seized? Did it have arms?

[Didn't hear answer]

Cederburg: Suppose we don't find the Americans? We can't let them take Americans off our ships and keep them.

Eastland: You're talking about an invasion of the mainland.

Cederburg: I'm saying it is not acceptable.

Eastland: That's an invasion. Hell, I'm for it.

McClellan: Are we just going into Koh Tang shooting?

President: We are going in to insure that none of these assets can be used.

McClellan: Do we have to fire before we know we have to?

President: If I were not to, I would be negligent.

McClellan: Can't we wait?

Eastland: No, we can't.

Albert: The charges on the Floor are that you have violated the law.

President: I have the right to protect American citizens.

Sparkman: Our Committee met and discussed this thing, then unanimously adopted this resolution: [Reads resolution]
Byrd: Did we give Cambodia a deadline?

Kissinger: No. We thought it not productive to give them that kind of warning so they could take counteraction.

Mansfield: I have to express my concern that we are once again invading by air the Asian mainland. We have plenty of force and I think it will not have a salubrious outcome.

Case: I am the author of the Church-Case Amendment. I disagree with Mike. The act wasn't designed to condone piracy but for other purposes. I think the actions were proper.

Byrd: Why were the leaders not consulted before the decision to strike the mainland? I'm for getting the ship back, but I think you should have given them a chance to urge caution.

President: That's a good question and I'll answer. It is my constitutional responsibility to command the forces and to protect Americans. It was my judgment, based on the advice of the JCS, that this was the prudent course of action. Had we put the Marines' lives in jeopardy by doing too little, I would have been negligent. It is better to do too much than too little.

Byrd: My only question is why didn't you at least give them a chance to express their reservation?

President: We have a separation of powers. The President is the Commander-in-Chief so long as he is within the law. I exercised my power under the law and I complied with the law. I would never forgive myself if the Marines had been attached by 2400 Cambodians.
10:30 am NSC. I listened: (1) Marine to prepare Jimmy to thing. (2) Marine from Jimmy to prepare to carry a 154. 154 is alerted.

DECLASSIFIED

300 A.M. NSC. NSC.

Marine to land on 154 in Korea and land on 154.

(1) Marine to land on 154 in Korea and land on 154.

(2) Marine in Japan.

(3) Away from land service and attack selected with C.A.P. off K.S., with C.A.P. and F.K.
90% of the things we've come to know, or feel, or believe, or cherish, are self-deception.

We call it heaven, but we never go there.

We call it the holy, and we never enter it.

We call it love, but we never know it.

We call it life, but we never live it.

We call it wisdom, but we never learn it.

We call it peace, but we never find it.

We call it success, but we never achieve it.

We call it security, but we never feel it.

We call it happiness, but we never experience it.

We call it honor, but we never possess it.

We call it truth, but we never ascertain it.

We call it beauty, but we never see it.

We call it perfection, but we never approach it.

We call it justice, but we never find it.

We call it friendship, but we never experience it.

We call it success, but we never achieve it.

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We call it success, but we never achieve it.
have come?
(Oh, here come)

E.S. why, suppose we don't find a man? We can't let
them take one off our things to help him.

Excerpt your talking about an unnecessary train!

Philadelphia. I'm saying it is not a lighted.

Excerpt, that's an mention. That's a fact.

McElroy are we just going into K.S. hunting?

I was one going to suggest that very of those exists
now to make

McElroy do we have to field before ever leave one from?

Why, wouldn't be expensive.

McElroy the worst we want.

Excerpt us we can't.

Watch change in place that you have situated.

P.D. think might go with one it's price.

Spend a that's that mentioned the thing, then commonly
adapted this mention. (Week)

Bpred did anyone Condor the deadline?

Hey, we sort it not percent to get them that
kind of working to the construction.

Mayfield, I know it's necessary concern that we one ever
again anyway by using time, maintained the
new plant of face and I think it would
not have substitute continue

Once I write of Church--can Schoepfl in
Muncie, it won't changed to continue

paving until further progress I think a
action under papers.
Why were we advised not to leave a month before the decision to take a vacation? His forgetting of the ship dates, but I think you should have given them a chance to escape without a question. A question to why didn't you try to require a chance to express their own concern. There were arguments of power, but I'm not sure we made sense of it. 2 strongest powers under a law, we have a good voice against myself. I believe he had been attended by 2400 Christians.